1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

on by intermediaries because of the seclusion common among upper class women. If the activity has proven successful during their life it is carried on into old age, and if not then it is dropped. Thus old women, like men, in Bornu have a place in society. It is not generally a position of great authority, although there are some notable exceptions. Certainly, however, deference and respect for the aged is a universal feature of good Kanuri manners. Blessing the young is a cultural symbol of this respect. Old people bless young people when the latter go on trips or there is some special event such as a birth or the naming of a new baby. The seriousness with which such blessings are given and received is evidence of the importance placed on the special capacities of wisdom and propriety that the Kanuri associate with old age.

Death

Just as pregnancy marks the potential beginning of life, so death marks the end. The Kanuri have a quiet accepting attitude toward death; it is unpleasant, but it is always there. The high mortality rate for children, and the desirability that as many as possible in a community attend a funeral means that Kanuri adults attend many more of these ceremonies than people in western society. Thus death and funerals are much more commonly noted and accepted than in the United States where the entire subject is considered repugnant.

The Kanuri believe that going to funerals helps the deceased person to achieve paradise. The more prayers said by as many people as possible and as many religious leaders as possible, then the better are the chances of success. Indeed this is not only true in death but throughout life. People go to a particular funeral because the deceased was "a man of our town," or they attend one in another locality because the person was a relative or a friend. Not to go, even to the funeral of a very low status person of one's own village, is unthinkable. A high ranking official of Magumeri remarked at a funeral of a poor, very old, butcher that only twenty years ago he would not have shaken the hand of such a man, but times have changed. However, when asked whether he would have attended such a man's funeral in former times he looked incredulous; there could be no question about it if they were of the same community. Thus death ties a community together and expresses one's membership in it. No matter what other differences may exist between people, there is one occasion when the only criterion for active participation is a common residence in the same locality.

The compulsion to go to funerals is very strong. Thus a young woman who teaches in the Bornu secondary school system and is highly westernized in many of her attitudes told me that she had to go to a funeral about 100 miles away in the bush. This involved very uncomfortable travel by lorry, then a long horseback ride in the rainy season. However, she never once considered the possibility that she might not attend even though there was every likelihood she would miss the ceremony. Her relatives were having a funeral—therefore she must go; there was no choice although she preferred not to go.

Kanuri burial ceremonies themselves are held as close to the first morning after death as is possible. I observed only one exception to this rule; a very old man

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

in Magumeri died in the morning and was buried in the afternoon. The people explained this by saying that it was the hot season and he had died early in the morning. To wait until the next morning, they said, was too long and not good for the community. This was an oblique way of referring to the belief that the ghost of a dead man is dangerous especially to children until he is buried.

The ceremony itself is quite simple. The body is washed, wrapped in a white cloth and placed on a bier, and then taken out to the burial grounds by the men. Prayers are said continually and the family mourns officially for forty days by saying special prayers and remaining close to home. During the ceremony men remain impassive, quietly telling their beads and praying softly to themselves. Women, on the other hand, come in groups walking slowly in single file wailing and crying, especially if the deceased is a close neighbor, friend, or relative. If a man is needed for a short communication, a woman might stop wailing suddenly, talk in an ordinary voice, then just as quickly resume her keening. A few women at every funeral were observed who were much more totally involved and did not break up their wailing when asked to do something else. Sometimes these wails of the women become songs with words. This is less true at funerals of men where if it happens the song or chant says over and over again, "He was a good man." For a dead woman the words are also, "She was a good woman," but an added verse, especially if the dead woman was not very old, refers to the hard life of a woman and how long and unending are her chores. There is a definite implication here that the heavy burdens of womanhood can bring an early death.

This, then is the Kanuri life cycle; it is adapted to Bornu society and the historical development of that society. The fact that the household is the major unit of social organization means that people of different ages are constantly in touch with one another. Even though those in all age groups have many friends of their own age, they associate freely and easily with people of all age groups within their household where membership crosses generation lines. This means that younger age groupings are constantly learning the ways of behaving and thinking of those older than themselves and almost automatically know how to act as they grow up. By contrast in many western societies interaction between generations is extremely difficult, and each generation seems to be developing an almost semi-separate culture whose intricacies must be learned after one has joined that particular age group. Because western schooling has not yet separated an entire generation from their parents, there is little room among the Kanuri for many discontinuities in learning, and therefore in hopes, fears, and aspirations on the part of each successive generation. Obviously this has produced and helps to maintain much of the stability in Kanuri society, and as such it is a key factor when we wish to ask questions about conditions of change in the entire society of Bornu.